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**KEY INFORMANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ACCESS LEASING
FOR HUNTING ON PRIVATE LANDS IN NEW YORK**

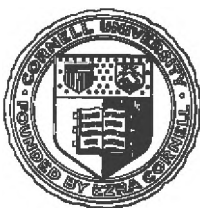
by

William F. Siemer, Tommy L. Brown, and Daniel J. Decker



December 1988

HDRU Series No. 88-9



**Human Dimensions Research Unit
Department of Natural Resources
New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
A Statutory College of the State University
Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y.**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

The 1980's has been a period of heightened interest in rural resource development, both in relation to community and regional economic development and in relation to additional income opportunities for rural landowners. Concurrently, reductions in public access to private lands for hunting that were documented in the 1970's appear to have continued (Brown et al. 1983, 1984). The combination of these developments may be creating an increased opportunity for private rural landowners to earn additional income by leasing access rights to hunters.

The purpose of this project is to: (1) evaluate the potential of fee-access leases for wildlife-related recreation (especially access for hunting) as a supplemental revenue source for landowners, and (2) assess possible needs for extension education programs. The project has 4 phases. The purpose of this report is to: (1) present the findings of study phase I and (2) discuss the implications of these results for the next phase of the study.

It was assumed that characterizing fee-access leasing and lessors in New York through direct contact with general landowners would be a difficult and costly task because very few landowners were known to be charging access fees in any given area. In light of this problem a preliminary survey was conducted to identify New York counties where a general landowner survey might yield a relatively high number of contacts with landowners who charged access fees. In each county up to 5 individuals whom we could assume to be knowledgeable about wildlife-related access leasing were contacted: 2 Fish and Wildlife Management Board (FWMB) members (i.e., sportsman representatives: n=53; landowner representatives: n=53), 1 Cornell Cooperative Extension field agent (n=51), 1 New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) officer (n=56), and 1 NYSDEC wildlife biologist (n=57).

A self-administered mail-back questionnaire with 20 items was developed to assess the current and expected status of access leasing for wildlife-related recreation in 57 counties of New York (boroughs of New York City were not contacted). Most questionnaire items were devoted to assessing the prevalence and nature of hunting-access leases. Respondents were instructed to define access leases as written or verbal agreements between private landowners and recreationists in which a cash payment is involved.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

As a whole, respondents' perceptions indicated that:

- at least a few landowners in nearly every county are charging recreationists access fees for wildlife-related recreation.
- leases for big game hunting are more common than leases for small game, turkey, or waterfowl hunting.
- access fees for fishing or nonconsumptive wildlife recreation occur in relatively few counties.
- in most counties the total number of landowners charging access fees did not change dramatically over the past 5 years, but the number of lessors in many counties will increase slightly over the coming 5-year period.
- the practice of access leasing has encouraged few additional landowners (i.e., landowners who would otherwise prohibit hunting) to permit access for hunting.
- fee-hunting arrangements have caused a slight reduction in the amount of private lands with open, no-fee hunting.
- NYSDEC administrative regions 1, 3, 4, and 6 (and specifically, Suffolk, Orange, Sullivan, Delaware, Saratoga, Lewis, and St. Lawrence Counties) have the highest number of lessors at present.

IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDY PHASE II

The best areas in which to achieve the stated objectives of study phase II would be those counties where: (1) access leasing for wildlife-related recreation is occurring, (2) hunting-access leasing has increased in the last 5 years, (3) hunting-access leasing is expected to increase in the next 5 years, and (4) a survey of private-nonindustrial landowners is likely to yield a high number of contacts with hunting-access lessors. Using these criteria, the results of study phase I suggest that Delaware, Orange, Saratoga, and St. Lawrence Counties may be appropriate locations for study phase II. Of these candidates, Delaware County may be the most appropriate. Delaware County had the highest known number of private nonindustrial lessors, and 3 respondents in that county believed fee-access leasing would increase there in the next 5 years.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
BACKGROUND AND NEED	1
PURPOSE	2
Objectives by Study Phase	2
METHODS	3
RESULTS	4
Current Perceptions of Fee-Access Leasing for Wildlife-Related Recreation	4
Trends and Impacts Associated with Access Leases for Hunting	5
Frequency of Hunting-Access Leasing by County	10
Relative Frequency of Specific Types of Hunting-Access Leases	12
Summary	14
DISCUSSION	14
Implications for Study Phase II	14
Parting Comments and Cautions	15
LITERATURE CITED	17

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LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>		<u>Page</u>
1	Counties where at least 1 respondent believed access leases for a given type of recreation were occurring in their designated county	7
2	Percent of respondents who believed 7 types of access leases certainly, probably, or probably did not occur in their designated county	9
3	Numbers of counties where at least 1 respondent believed the the following leasing-related trends are occurring (by NYSDEC administrative region)	9
4	A listing of counties (by NYSDEC administrative region) where at least 1 respondent: (1) believed at least 25 lessors existed, (2) was personally aware of 11 or more lessors, or (3) believed the highest possible number of lessors was at least 50	11
5	A numerical breakdown of New York counties where more than 50% of all hunting access leases in a county were believed to be for general, big game, small game, turkey, or waterfowl hunting	13

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>		<u>Page</u>
1	Administrative regions of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation	6
2	A representation of New York counties based on their potential as locations for a proposed study of landowners who lease access rights to hunters. Broad black lines represent boundaries of NYSDEC administrative regions; numbers represent NYSDEC administrative region numbers	16

KEY INFORMANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ACCESS LEASING FOR HUNTING ON PRIVATE LANDS IN NEW YORK

BACKGROUND AND NEED

The 1980's has been a period of heightened interest in rural resource development, both in relation to community and regional economic development and in relation to additional income opportunities for rural landowners. Concurrently, reductions in public access to private lands for hunting that were documented in the 1970's appear to have continued (Brown et al. 1983, 1984). The combination of these developments may be creating an increased opportunity for private rural landowners to earn additional income by leasing access rights to hunters.

The Federal Renewable Resources Extension Act of 1978 (RREA), Public Law 95-306, authorizes funding of Cooperative Extension programs designed to help landowners evaluate this opportunity. The goal of programs using RREA funds is to provide increased information to private forest and rangeland owners to help them more effectively manage the natural resources on their lands for increased production and income. For the 1988-1991 period, Cornell Cooperative Extension faculty and staff in Cornell's Department of Natural Resources have planned to investigate the need for a landowner education program on hunting-access leases. Situation-analysis research is needed to accomplish this objective.

In many areas of New York, demand for hunting-access leases would represent a new market for landowners interested in a supplemental source of income. To date, limited effort has been made in New York to collect or provide basic information needed for education programs that would help landowners make informed personal decisions about the practice of access leasing. Baseline studies are needed to assess the level of demand for fee-access leases for wildlife-related recreation in each region of the state.

Information is needed on the elements of fee access arrangements that appeal to wildlife recreationists. In areas where demand is sufficiently high to warrant further market research, information is needed on the suppliers of fee access areas--the characteristics of landowners charging recreationists an access fee (i.e., the lessors), their leases, and the properties (e.g., types of wildlife habitat) they currently offer. Moreover, information is needed on the effects of fee-access leasing on remaining public access, and the compatibility of fee access practices with existing land-use patterns and the goals and attitudes of the general landowners in a region (Kellert 1981, Sheriff et al. 1981). This type of information should facilitate the development of not only extension education programs, but also informed public policy on access leasing. Better information on access leasing may facilitate the efforts of public agencies to encourage the conservation, creation, or enhancement of wildlife habitat (Ruff and Isaac 1987) and greater access for wildlife-related recreation (Langer 1987).

PURPOSE

The purpose of this project is to: (1) evaluate the potential of fee-access leases for wildlife-related recreation (especially access for hunting) as a supplemental revenue source for landowners, and (2) assess possible needs for extension education programs. The project has 4 phases.

Objectives By Study Phase:

Phase I: Assess qualitatively the key characteristics and prevalence of fee-access leasing in each county of New York.

Phase II: Determine the incidence of fee-access leasing among rural landowners and landowner interest in the practice of access leasing for hunting for one or more key areas of the state.

Determine the characteristics of lessors and any business activities associated with or complementary to access leasing.

- Phase III: Determine the key characteristics and attitudes of hunting lessees in one or more key areas of the state.
- Phase IV: Synthesize information from Phases I - III to evaluate the potential of hunting leases as an alternative revenue source for landowners.

The purpose of this report is to: (1) present the findings of study phase I and (2) discuss the implications of these results for the next phase of the study.

METHODS

It was assumed that characterizing fee-access leasing and lessors in New York through direct contact with general landowners would be a difficult and costly task because very few landowners were known to be charging access fees in any given area. In light of this problem a preliminary survey was conducted to identify New York counties where a general landowner survey might yield a high number of contacts with landowners who charged access fees. In each county up to 5 individuals whom we could assume to be knowledgeable about wildlife-related access leasing were contacted: 2 Fish and Wildlife Management Board (FWMB) members (i.e., sportsman representatives: n=53; landowner representatives: n=53), 1 Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) field agent (n=51), 1 New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) officer (n=56), and 1 NYSDEC wildlife biologist (n=57). Landowner and sportsman representatives for each county were identified from a current listing of FWMB members. Cornell Cooperative Extension agents were identified from a current listing of CCE agricultural program leaders. Names and addresses of conservation officers were obtained from NYSDEC law enforcement captains in administrative regions 1, and 3 through 9. Wildlife biologists were contacted by their respective regional wildlife manager, who was provided

with 1 questionnaire for each county of his region to forward to the field biologist most familiar with hunting leases in each particular county.

A self-administered mail-back questionnaire with 20 items was developed to assess the current and expected status of access leasing for wildlife-related recreation in 57 counties of New York*. Most questionnaire items were devoted to assessing the prevalence and nature of hunting-access leases. Respondents were instructed to define access leases as written or verbal agreements between private landowners and recreationists whereby access is permitted in exchange for a cash payment.

Survey implementation was preceded by internal memos to NYSDEC regional wildlife managers and law enforcement captains, and an interagency press release to all Cornell Cooperative Extension personnel. The survey was implemented during June and July of 1988. Nonrespondents received 1-3 follow-up mailings at 7- to 14-day intervals. Responses to individual questionnaire items were analyzed by county and NYSDEC administrative region. Responses from each of the 5 respondent populations were analyzed collectively and individually. Frequencies and summary statistics were computed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences computer program (SPSSX) (SPSS 1986).

RESULTS

Current Perceptions of Fee-Access Leasing for Wildlife-Related Recreation

Ninety-two percent (n=244) of those contacted returned completed surveys. Responses from the groups contacted varied from 71% to 100%. When asked if they believed any private landowners in their designated county were charging

*Representatives from the 5 boroughs of New York City (assumed to have no leasing activity) were not contacted.

wildlife recreationists an access fee, 60% of all respondents said "yes." At least 1 respondent replied affirmatively for 55 of 57 counties. All respondents for the respective counties believed some landowners charged recreationists for access in Suffolk, Orange, Columbia, Delaware, Hamilton, Schuyler, and Seneca Counties. In Livingston and Wyoming Counties no respondents believed such transactions occurred.

In all 8 NYSDEC administrative regions (Figure 1), and in 48 counties, at least 1 respondent believed one or more landowners were charging big game (i.e., deer or bear) hunters access fees (Table 1). Fee-access arrangements for small game and waterfowl hunting also appeared to be widespread (i.e., at least 1 respondent in 34 and 27 counties, respectively, believed these arrangements certainly occurred). Fewer respondents believed landowners were charging access fees for turkey hunting or fishing (Table 2). In only 10 counties did at least 1 respondent believe landowners in that county were charging access fees for nonconsumptive wildlife recreation. Sullivan, Delaware, Hamilton and Herkimer were the only counties where combined responses indicated that all 7 types of leasing likely occurred.

Trends and Impacts Associated with Access Leases for Hunting

About 1 of 4 respondents who believed leasing occurred in their designated county also believed the number of lessors had increased over the last 5 years. At least 1 respondent in 36 different counties believed the number of lessors had increased (Table 3). The most common response (nearly 40%) to this question was that leasing activity had remained about the same. More than 1 in 4 respondents did not believe they could answer the question.

About half of all respondents believed the number of lessors in their designated county would increase in the next 5 years. At least 1 respondent in 52 different counties believed the number of lessors would increase (Table

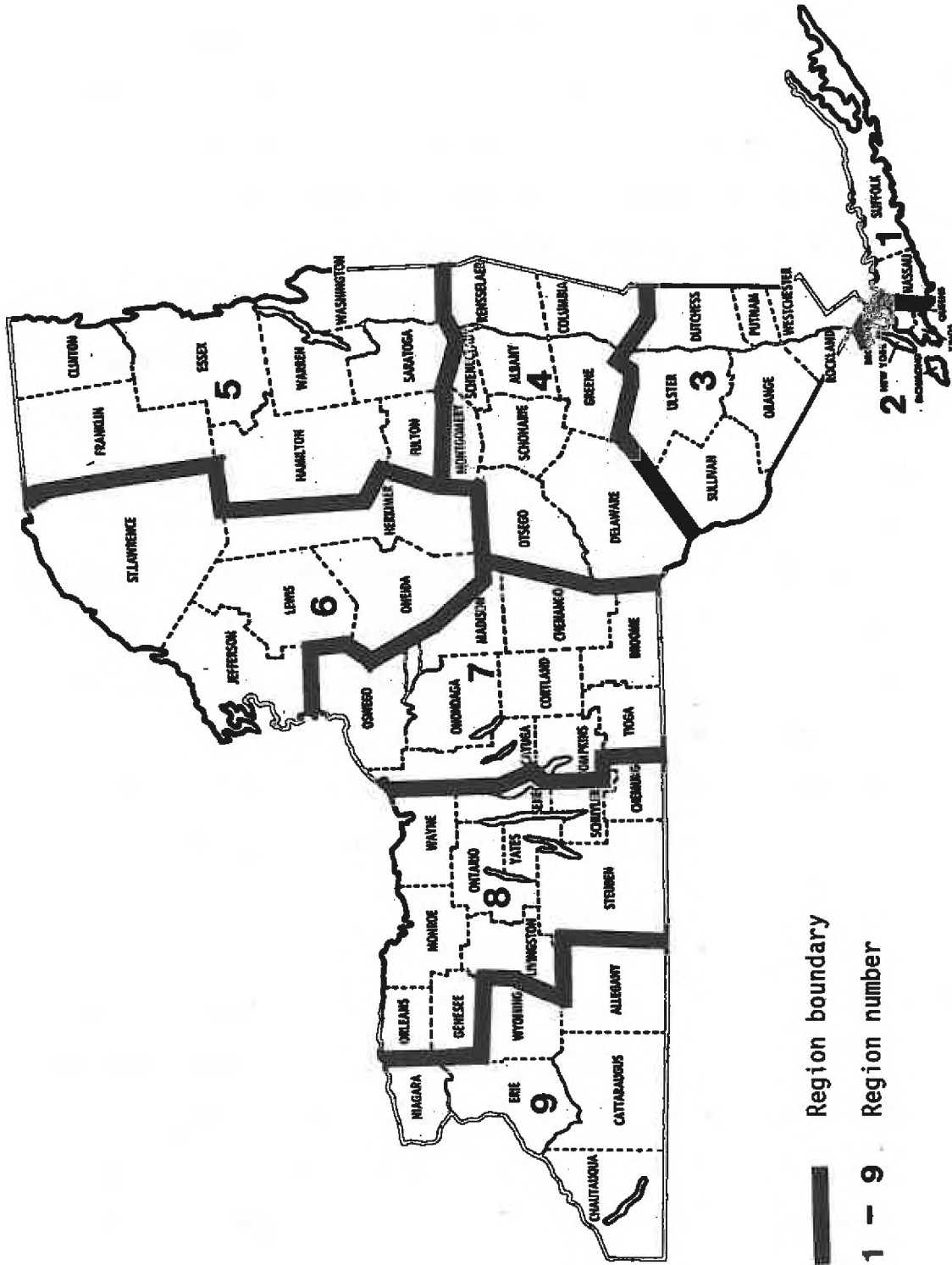


Figure 1. Administrative regions of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

Table 1. Counties where at least 1 respondent believed access leases for a given type of recreation were occurring in their designated county.

		<u>Primary recreation associated with lease</u>						
<u>DEC Admin. Region</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Big Game Hunting</u>	<u>Small Game hunting</u>	<u>Turkey Hunting</u>	<u>Waterfowl Hunting</u>	<u>Fishing: Public waters</u>	<u>Fishing: Private Waters</u>	<u>Other</u>
1	NASSAU				X			X
1	SUFFOLK	X	X		X	X		
3	DUTCHESS	X	X	X				
3	ORANGE	X	X		X			X
3	PUTNAM	X	X	X				
3	ROCKLAND							
3	SULLIVAN	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
3	ULSTER	X	X	X			X	X
3	WESTCHESTER	X	X				X	
4	ALBANY	X	X					
4	COLUMBIA	X	X			X	X	
4	DELAWARE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
4	GREENE	X	X			X	X	
4	MONTGOMERY	X						
4	OTSEGO	X						
4	RENSSELAER	X	X	X	X			
4	SCHENECTADY	X		X				
4	SCHOHARIE						X	
5	CLINTON	X	X	X	X			
5	ESSEX	X	X	X	X		X	
5	FRANKLIN	X	X	X	X	X	X	
5	FULTON	X	X				X	
5	HAMILTON	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5	SARATOGA	X	X	X	X	X		
5	WARREN	X	X					
5	WASHINGTON	X	X					
6	HERKIMER	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
6	JEFFERSON	X		X	X			
6	LEWIS	X	X		X	X	X	X
6	ONEIDA	X				X		
6	ST. LAWRENCE	X	X	X	X		X	

Table 1. (Continued)

Primary recreation associated with lease

<u>DEC Region</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Big Game Hunting</u>	<u>Small Game hunting</u>	<u>Turkey Hunting</u>	<u>Waterfowl Hunting</u>	<u>Fishing: Public waters</u>	<u>Fishing: Private Waters</u>	<u>Other</u>
7	BROOME	X	X	X	X		X	
7	CAYUGA	X			X			
7	CHENANGO	X	X		X		X	
7	CORTLAND	X						
7	MADISON	X						
7	ONONDAGA	X			X		X	
7	OSWEGO	X			X	X	X	
7	TIOGA	X	X					
7	TOMPKINS	X	X		X	X	X	
8	CHEMUNG	X	X			X		X
8	GENESEE	X			X			
8	LIVINGSTON							
8	MONROE	X		X	X			
8	ONTARIO		X					
8	ORLEANS	X	X	X	X	X		
8	SCHUYLER			X			X	
8	SENECA		X		X			
8	STEUBEN	X			X	X		X
8	WAYNE	X			X	X		
8	YATES	X	X			X		
9	ALLEGANY	X	X	X				
9	CATTARAUGUS	X		X				
9	CHAUTAUQUA	X			X			
9	ERIE					X		
9	NIAGARA		X		X			
9	WYOMING							
Total number of counties where leasing arrangements are believed to occur		48	34	20	27	19	19	10

Table 2. Percent of respondents who believed 7 types of access leases certainly, probably, or probably did not occur in their designated county.

	Does this type of leasing occur in your county?				Totals
	Certainly	Probably	Probably Not	Don't Know	
Big game leases	70%	20%	6%	4%	100%
Small game leases	34	24	25	17	100
Turkey hunting leases	19	28	28	25	100
Waterfowl hunting leases	28	19	28	25	100
Public angling leases	17	9	41	33	100
Private angling leases	20	18	30	32	100
Other leases	9	2	56	33	100

Table 3. Numbers of counties where at least 1 respondent believed the following leasing-related trends are occurring (by NYSDEC administrative region).

Number of counties where at least 1 respondent believed:					
NYSDEC Region	County Total	# of lessors increased in last 5 years	# of lessors will rise in the next 5 years	Leasing increased # of owners who permit hunting	Leasing decreased amount of no-fee hunting land
1	2	0	1	2	0
3	7	2	5	3	2
4	9	8	9	2	4
5	8	6	8	3	6
6	5	3	5	4	4
7	9	5	8	6	3
8	11	8	11	3	8
9	6	4	5	0	3
Total	57	36	52	23	30

3). Only 4 counties, in NYSDEC administrative regions 1 and 3, had representatives who believed the number of landowners charging access fees for wildlife-related recreation was likely to decrease. In those counties some respondents commented that an increase in leasing activity was unlikely because most private landowners with suitable hunting lands were already involved in exclusive access arrangements with hunting clubs.

More than half of those who believed leasing occurred in their designated county also believed this had caused little change in the number of landowners who allowed hunting (Table 3). About 1 in 6 (at least 1 respondent in 23 different counties) believed it had caused some additional landowners to allow hunting. One respondent from Sullivan, Westchester, and Delaware Counties believed leasing in those places had greatly increased the number of landowners who permitted hunting. About 1 in 4 respondents did not believe they could answer this question.

Almost 60% of those who believed leasing occurred in their designated county also believed this had caused little change in the total amount of land on which hunters were allowed access free-of-charge. About 1 in 5 (at least 1 respondent in 30 different counties) believed it had caused a decrease in the amount of land where hunters were allowed access without a fee (Table 3). About 1 in 10 respondents did not believe they could answer the question.

Frequency of Hunting-Access Leasing by County

Each respondent was asked to give an upper and lower estimate of the number of landowners in their county who charged a fee for hunting access. Upper estimates of the lessors in a given county ranged from 0 to 800. The most common estimate was 10. More than half of all upper estimates were between 1 and 15. In 16 counties the upper estimate of at least 1 person in the county exceeded 50 (Table 4). In Suffolk, Dutchess, Orange, Delaware,

Table 4. A listing of counties (by NYSDEC administrative region) where at least 1 respondent: (1) believed at least 25 lessors existed, (2) was personally aware of 11 or more lessors, or (3) believed the highest possible number of lessors was at least 50.

NYSDEC Regions	At minimum, 25 or more lessors in the county	Personal awareness of 11 or more lessors	Maximum number of lessors exceeds 50
1	Suffolk	Suffolk	Suffolk
3	Dutchess Orange Sullivan Ulster	Orange Sullivan	Dutchess Orange Sullivan
4	Delaware	Delaware	Delaware
5	Saratoga Washington		Washington
6	Lewis Oneida St. Lawrence	Jefferson Lewis St. Lawrence	Oneida St. Lawrence
7	Chenango Onondaga	Cayuga	Chenango Onondaga
8	Genesee Seneca	Orleans Wayne	Genesee Orleans Seneca Wayne
9	Chautauqua Erie		Chautauqua Erie

Oneida, St. Lawrence, Wayne, Allegany, and Erie Counties the upper estimate of at least 1 person in the county exceeded 100.

Lower estimates of the number of lessors in a given county also ranged from 0 to 800. The most common estimate was 10. More than half of all lower estimates were between 1 and 6. For 16 counties, at least 1 person gave a lower estimate of 25 or more lessors (Table 4). In Suffolk, Orange, Sullivan, Delaware, Saratoga, Lewis, and St. Lawrence Counties at least 1 person in the county gave a lower estimate of 50 or more lessors.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the number of lessors they were personally aware of in their designated county. Responses to this question ranged from 0 to 665. Nearly half of those who responded knew of only 1 or 2 lessors. Ninety percent of those who responded knew of 10 or fewer lessors. Most (70%) of the counties where at least 1 respondent knew of more than 10 lessors were in eastern New York.

Relative Frequency of Specific Types of Hunting-Access Leases

Respondents were asked to give their best estimate of the number of leases in their county which were general (i.e., type of hunting unspecified), or related to big game, small game, turkey, or waterfowl hunting. Responses indicated that in most counties where some leasing occurred, small game, turkey, and waterfowl hunting leases represented less than 50 % of all leasing activity (Table 5). Counties where the majority of leasing was related to general hunting (i.e., type of hunting unspecified) or big game hunting were more common.

Respondents in all 5 sample groups had difficulty estimating the number of specific types of hunting leases (e.g., big game, turkey) in their county that were daily, seasonal, or annual in duration. Across the 5 sample groups, from 20% to 70% of the respondents who believed leasing occurred in their

Table 5. A numerical breakdown of New York counties where more than 50% of all hunting access leases in a county were believed to be for general, big game, small game, turkey, or waterfowl hunting.

		Numbers of counties where more than 50% of all county leases are of the following type:				
	Number of counties where leasing occurs -----	General Hunting ::: ::: :::	Big Game Hunting ::: ::: :::	Small Game hunting ::: ::: :::	Turkey Hunting ::: ::: :::	Waterfowl Hunting ::: ::: :::
Cooperative Extension Agents (n=43)	24*	4	6	1	0	3
FWMB Landowner Representative (n=42)	30	2	12	0	0	1
FWMB Sportsmen Representative (n=28)	13	3	2	0	0	1
NYSDEC Wildlife Biologists (n=50)	44	8	18	2	2	6
NYSDEC Conservation Officers (n=48)	35	7	15	0	1	1
=====						

*Row totals do not equal number of counties where leasing occurs because not all response categories are shown.

county left these items blank or responded, "I don't know". Thus, data on the relative number of daily, seasonal or annual leases were not usable.

Summary:

As a whole, respondents perceptions indicate that:

- at least a few landowners in nearly every county are charging recreationists access fees for wildlife-related recreation.
- leases for big game hunting are more common than leases for small game, turkey, or waterfowl hunting.
- access fees for fishing or nonconsumptive wildlife recreation occur in relatively few counties.
- in most counties the total number of landowners charging access fees did not change dramatically over the past 5 years, but the number of lessors in many counties will increase slightly over the coming 5-year period.
- the practice of access leasing has encouraged few additional landowners (i.e., landowners who would otherwise prohibit hunting) to permit access for hunting.
- fee-hunting arrangements have caused a slight reduction in the amount of private lands with open, no-fee hunting.
- NYSDEC administrative regions 1, 3, 4, and 6 (and specifically, Suffolk, Orange, Sullivan, Delaware, Saratoga, Lewis, and St. Lawrence Counties) have the highest number of lessors at present.

DISCUSSION

Implications For Phase II

Key informants' written comments suggest that it is common in some counties of New York for private landowners to grant exclusive access rights to small groups in exchange for services (e.g., posting, patrolling), but that the practice of charging access fees for wildlife-related recreation does not occur as frequently. Nevertheless, some evidence emerged from study phase I to suggest that current and expected demand for hunting-access leases that involve a fee may be sufficiently high to warrant further research on this practice in several counties.

Not all counties in the state appear to be appropriate locations for the second phase of this study. The best areas in which to achieve the stated objectives of study phase II would be those counties where: (1) access leasing for wildlife-related recreation is occurring, (2) hunting-access leasing has increased in the last 5 years, (3) hunting-access leasing is expected to increase in the next 5 years, and (4) a survey of private-nonindustrial landowners is likely to yield a high number of contacts with hunting-access lessors. Using these criteria, the results of study phase I suggest that Delaware, Orange, Saratoga, and St. Lawrence Counties may be appropriate locations for study phase II (Figure 2). Of these candidates, Delaware County may be the most promising. Delaware County had the highest known number of private nonindustrial lessors, and 3 respondents in that county believed fee-access leasing would increase there in the next 5 years.

Parting Comments and Cautions

This survey was not designed to provide a quantitative assessment of access leasing activity such as might be collected through a statewide survey with a random sample of general landowners. Although this study provides a useful, general assessment of fee-access leasing activity in New York, and critical planning information for ongoing phases of this research project, it should not be interpreted as an accurate depiction of the actual incidence of access leasing for wildlife-related recreation in New York. The individuals surveyed do not have (nor were they expected to have) complete information on landowners and land-use practices in their assigned county. This is evidenced by the fact that many individuals were unsure about leasing activity, and each sample group offered a somewhat different perception of access leasing practices.



*Candidate counties are those where at least 1 person in that county believed the practice of hunting-access leasing was occurring, had increased in the last 5 years, and would increase in the next 5 years. Projected number of lessors is based on the maximum estimate offered in that county.

Figure 2. A representation of New York counties based on their potential as locations for a proposed study of landowners who lease access rights to hunters. Broad black lines represent boundaries of NYSDEC administrative regions; numbers represent NYSDEC administrative region numbers.

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